

## Motherhood, Careers, and Spirituality

I grew up in the turbulent '60s and '70s, when so many habits and values that underlay North American society came into question. In particular, roles women and men played in the home were no longer taken for granted but began to be questioned as more and more women explored their gifts and desires and moved into the marketplace.

In my own family, this transition seemed to split my older siblings into two different eras. Being the fifth of six children, I watched my oldest sister take on what looked to me like a traditional role as mother and servant in her home. Meanwhile, my next oldest sister participated in anti-war protests, read feminist works, and rebelled against traditional views of the world.

Whether my perceptions of my older siblings were correct or not, they had a deep impact on my understanding of who I would be as an adult. In fact, they threw me into a dilemma. On the one hand, I had great admiration for my mother, who had created a meaningful and rewarding life for herself and her children within the traditional role in which she lived. I wanted to be like her. On the other hand, I wanted the rights and privileges of the women of my age. I wanted to explore my own gifts and to be able to use them as I chose.

Another piece of the puzzle was my conversion at 17 to "evangelical" Christianity from a "mainstream" upbringing. It was the Jesus people era, a very exciting time to be engaged in religious life, but also one that brought many of my values into question. In that setting I was truly confronted for the first time with the idea that women were to be subordinate to men in the home and in the church. I have been struggling with that one ever since!

The church in North America has had its own struggles with the changing of the culture around it, and women and men of all ages have made great changes in their lifestyles, with or without its help. Because the church has often been reluctant to deal honestly and openly with these issues, women in particular, especially in the area of the family, have been left to make the transitions on their own.

This issue of Report is about two of the questions women face in the changing patterns of our church and community. One is the transition from full-time mothering to a career. How does one overcome the belief system perpetuated in society and the church that the best option for a woman is to be a wife and mother? How does one overcome the feelings of inadequacy that hold her back from exploring her gifts? When is the right time to hear and answer a "call" to enter a career? Gloria Neufeld Redekop, Mary Regehr and Betty Phillips reflect on these and other questions.

The last two articles in this issue are reflections on motherhood and spirituality. How does one find time to grow spiritually in the midst of the practical and exhausting life of caring for one's children? How can one concentrate on hearing God's voice when the children's needs are constantly interrupting one's thoughts? Wanda Derksen and Dora Dueck share their thoughts on the source of their nourishment and how parenthood has helped them see their faith in a different light.

As I reflect now, a 35-year-old mother with a toddler and one on the way, I feel fortunate to have the examples of many women who have carved their way through both of these issues. I hope the stories here will enrich your life as they have mine.—Lori Matties

**Lori Matties was a member of the Committee on Women's Concerns from 1988 to 1990. She lives in Winnipeg with her husband, Gordon, and their daughter, Zoe.**



*This issue pays tribute to the life of Lee Hazelton of Ottawa, Ontario who passed away on June 11, 1988 after a unique struggle with cancer. Her husband, Phil, suggested that donations be made to MCC for use in publishing an issue relating to Lee's commitment to mothering and her struggles with career decisions. While she was a successful potter during the time that the children were young, in later years her struggle focused on finding a fulfilling career beyond the home. Phil has made available Lee's collection of writings and artwork, some of which are included in this issue. They weave an inspiring mosaic of a courageous, loving and creative woman whose relentless search for meaningful self-expression continued to the end.*

—Eleanor Dyck and Gloria Neufeld Redekop

by Gloria Neufeld Redekop

## Difficult Transitions

You  
are a woman  
you are strong  
in mind and in body  
you have the power  
to speak your mind  
say what you feel  
opportunity is within  
your reach  
take it...  
“take it,” (she said)  
and I did.

(adapted excerpt from “Mother to Daughter,” by Mary Beth Seefelt in Kindred Spirits, Sept/Oct 1988).

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Before I was married, I taught elementary school. I enjoyed my job. I was well-respected by colleagues, liked by students and was always brimming with new creative ideas. My greatest desire was to be married. When that happened, I knew my career would end. I wouldn't want a career anymore, because “when you get married, you are supremely happy in your new role as wife and mother.” That's all I ever wanted to be.

After marriage, I taught school two more years before having children. For the next seven years I stayed at home to raise children because that is what I wanted to do. As the days, weeks, months and years went by, any memory of my career faded. I became deeply involved in diaper changing, making baby food, taking kids to the park, finger painting, and in my spare time, reading up on how to be a good mother.

The transition from career to home was difficult for me. But I became involved in a few extras like oil painting lessons and piano lessons. And I loved my children. I loved teaching them. I loved watching each new stage of development and meticulously recorded it in the baby book. I came to accept my new life.

It wasn't long, however, before I found it difficult to follow an adult conversation. I was comfortable with baby talk and recipe talk, but I hadn't kept up with politics and wasn't reading anything that wasn't directly related to raising children and keeping house. How quickly my life had changed. I felt insecure among adults. I realized how isolated my life was, but lacked the courage and ability to change it.

My husband would often ask me what my professional interests were. He was perfectly willing to stay home with the children if I wanted to pursue a career. But having become preoccupied with day-to-day problem solving and simply coping with three beautiful, energetic children, I had lost any interest in what I might want and could not project my thoughts to “life after kids.”

During this time of my life, I was fortunate enough to be part of a church community in which everyone was important and everyone participated equally. Sunday was my favorite day. It was a day of creativity—lively singing, intimate sharing, banner-making, drama, and eating. Children were included and welcomed; sermons were unheard of. This was a very fulfilling part of my life, and in this context I had the freedom to lead worship confidently. Here I could relate to adults in a meaningful way.

**I have learned that while I have been prepared to act more assertively (and have done so) I have not been prepared to accept the consequences, i.e. that sometimes people will respond negatively or will not meet my needs.  
Practice will help.—Lee Hazleton.**

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When my youngest child was two years old, my husband and I decided to go to seminary. Although it was scary for me, since I had been out of school for 12 years, I loved the stimulation. I successfully completed a masters degree in biblical studies. Following seminary I co-pastored a Mennonite church for two years, and presently I am completing a doctoral program in religion at the University of Ottawa.

It is now 10 years since I took that first step out of the home. In one way the change from full-time homemaker to full-time student occurred overnight, but the mental and emotional transition is still underway.

Until very recently, my self-conception has been first and foremost as a mother and homemaker. I have thought of my student role as something I do in my spare time—when no one else in the family needs me. The change of consciousness from servant of the family to career person has been one of my most difficult struggles during this transition period. I carry around in my psyche the problems, appointments, and responsibilities of everyone in the family. This was not because no one else pitched in. My husband has always been active in home responsibilities. But it took a great deal of effort on both of our parts to realize that “helping” with childraising and housework was different from taking responsibility for children’s schedules and worrying through the specific concerns of family members. To shed the internal responsibility I feel for them all, that is the difficult thing.

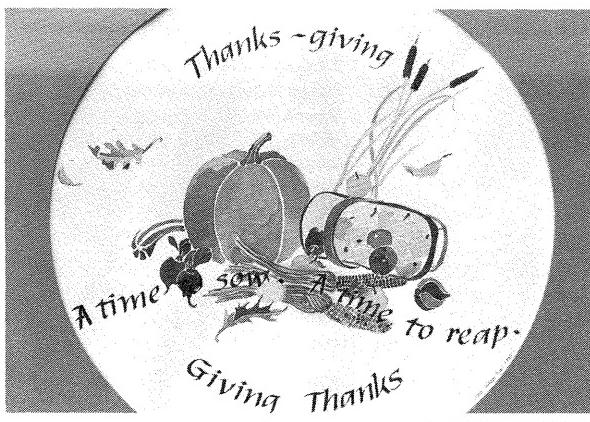


How is one freed from that? While I am still learning, one thing I have had to do is just leave some things undone. I have caught myself adding other family members’ appointments and deadlines to my list of things to do (so that I could remind them) and then forced myself to cross it out. I have to be prepared to let some things remain undone, and if children don’t return library books on time or if they forget their doctor’s appointment, that’s up to them. At 12, 15 and 18 years old they are responsible enough to remember those things. And when the doctor’s receptionist phones to ask me about a missed appointment, I must remember that it wasn’t my fault, so I say, “I’ll have him/her call you as soon as they come in.” Letting go of some of these things has freed me to do a little dreaming about my own future. It has freed me to separate myself from my children and home enough to think about a future career. I have found that in the long run it is better for the children, too, because it frees them to become more independent and responsible.

Another area of struggle for me has been with self image. It amazes me how long it has taken to feel confident within the context of the adult world. I needed to learn so much all at once. What was happening in the political scene? What did those big words mean that people were using? Somehow all of this had passed me by during those seven years of enjoying my babies. I couldn’t even write a business letter. When I did contribute to an adult discussion, I fumbled and wasn’t sure of what I was saying. I felt “dumb.”

I am saddened that during this important transition period from home to career I did not find within the church a support comparable to what I had experienced during the first transition from career to motherhood. In some ways, my confidence has been sapped even further through church participation. I have been criticized and labelled. However, within the context of small group activity I have experienced acceptance, support, and encouragement. One example of this occurred at the important juncture when I was deciding if I should commence a doctoral program. I called a group of about six people to help me in the discernment process. This was very helpful. Since then, the group’s decision has often come to mind and sustained me when I become weighed down with work.

Looking back at these distinct stages of my life, I realize that one underlying reason for prolonged and intense struggles in the most recent transition period from home to career had to do with my belief system, a system that



We are all children of God and the sooner we realize this the better, so that we can live together as God intended us—in harmony.—Lee Hazelton.

was prevalent in society and reinforced by the church. In my growing-up years, as far as I was concerned, the only appropriate careers for a woman were nursing or teaching, either of which could be chosen and practiced until the right man came along. I was not as fortunate as my 12-year-old daughter who recently attended workshops on "Career Women in Math and Science" and "Women in the Trades."

The church endorsed the importance of woman as wife and mother as is illustrated by the 1981 Mennonite Brethren General Conference resolution on "The Ministry of Women in the Church:"

"We would caution against those modern currents of thought which tend to minimize the significance of a woman's high calling to be a wife and a mother to her children, and we should do all that we can to strengthen the family and to establish it on Biblical principles."

Certainly motherhood is a "high calling," but by lifting this up to the exclusion of other possible "callings," women are denied a chance to develop to their fullest potential and the church is denied the benefit of the variety of women's other vocations and gifts.

I truly believed that sufficient conditions for the ideal life of a woman were a good husband and family, and to these I desperately aspired. Had my belief system been otherwise, had I expected of myself anything else beyond mothering and home management, had I questioned the implicit limitation put on women by both society and church, then I might have had the freedom to dream of another life beyond the supportive role I thought was mine as a woman.

**As a doctoral student in religious studies at the University of Ottawa, Gloria Neufeld Redekop is studying women's history. Her thesis topic concerns Mennonite Women's Associations in Canada—change and continuity. She lives with her husband and three children in Gloucester, Ont., where they are active in the Ottawa Mennonite Church.**

by Mary Regehr

## Answering God's Call

Career? Who thought of a career in high school, or even in college? I didn't. I was having fun; I wasn't thinking career.

I knew someday I would settle down. That was my aim, my wish, my "goal." It was something I took for granted would happen. It happened like that for most, and it would for me. And it did.

In 1949 I was married, and soon thereafter I became pregnant. It really never occurred to me that women, especially I, would do anything else. Oh, yes, I would be a mother, a wife, a "homemaker" and live happily ever after.

Three other children joined the family over the next decade or so. There were all sorts of struggles—financial ones raising four children, marriage adjustments and struggles, and the usual in-law struggles. But to think of ever actually doing something else never crossed my thinking. I had unconsciously decided that I was not bright enough to do anything else except be a housewife.

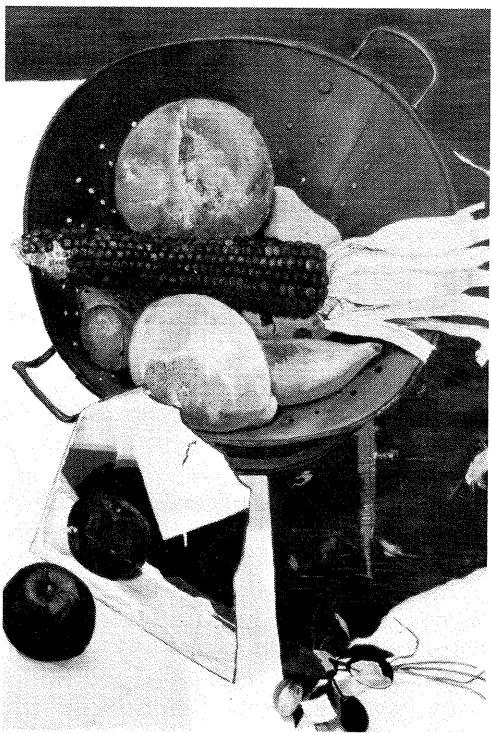
And yet, deep inside there was an undefinable discontent. Questions like "Is this it?" "Who am I really?" "Am I only an extension of my husband and family?" kept passing through my mind.

Children grow up and values and priorities change. I was 40, my husband was at seminary, and I decided it would be good for me to audit some courses in the evenings. Those courses whetted and stirred something in me that felt good. I enjoyed the learning, the mental stimulation.

**A new year is beginning.  
Although it has been a  
difficult past year in many  
ways, I feel the joy and  
freshness and gratefulness  
of being able to learn and  
grow and to have a new  
chance every day to live  
life to the fullest and learn  
God's will.—Lee Hazelton.**



Upon our return to Winnipeg, my husband, John, resumed his teaching career and our eldest son was soon married. I began to realize that being a mother and homemaker wasn't the only thing that mattered to me.



I was active in church related activities, and began to host bus tours. Yet academically I felt inadequate and was too easily intimidated by those who were "well educated," as I perceived education then.

When John took his first sabbatical leave, my interest in pursuing something else was more than a whim or a wish. I had "heard" God's call to me. Only two of our children were still at home, and both were in high school, freeing me for more than keeping the house and cooking the meals.

During that sabbatical year I immersed myself in courses, seminars and other events at the School of Pastoral Care in Winston-Salem, N.C., still auditing.

Two comments from different persons jolted me into a new awareness. Could I actually go back to school? Could I actually handle university after nearly 30 years

since my college days? The idea was unthinkable to me, and I tried to dismiss it, yet the inner urging didn't leave. Maybe I could—perhaps I could even become a counsellor and work with women. That's how God's call began to take shape in my mind. I knew nothing about sexual abuse or battered women at the time, and yet God's hand was in this thinking.

In the fall of 1977 I enrolled for a unit of pastoral education. I continued a clinical unit in the summer of 1978 in the hospital. A new world had opened up to me and, fearful though it was, I forged ahead. I discovered I had a brain that still worked. In the fall of 1979 I registered for a full program in counselling at the University of Manitoba and graduated in 1982.

Alongside my studies I began counselling at home. I "practiced" as I learned (under supervision) and learned as I practiced and my counselling practice grew. God's call became more of a reality than I could have imagined. Battered women came, sexually abused women and children came, and others came who "needed" to talk to another woman. For 12 years I worked from my home in a private practice, a home that by now felt large and empty with the children all gone.

In September, 1989, Recovery of Hope, a program designed to help troubled marriages, opened its doors in Winnipeg, its first venture into Canada. Among others, I was asked to be a volunteer counsellor at the Saturday morning seminars starting in November.

After the first seminar, we heard there had been requests for other counselling. Originally this had not been in the plan for Recovery of Hope at the time.

Just after Christmas, an ad appeared in our church bulletin. The director at Recovery of Hope was leaving in February and the board was asking for a director/counsellor. John and I applied together—we got the job. At "retirement" age, I am working at an honest-to-goodness job with a "real" pay cheque. John and I are presently co-directors and counsellors, the two of us sharing one full-time position.

Does a career fit when you reach 65? Why not? It has been an interesting journey for me. It has also been meaningful and fulfilling. I am touching other lives at a deep level. I am weeping with those who weep and rejoicing with those who rejoice. There is so much weeping, so much pain, and so few to listen and to care.



**Have had three or four dreams with the same theme—going uphill. In one I'm riding a bike uphill. It's harder for me than my companion who pedals more easily—but I can see the top of the hill and I know I'll make it. I get off and push the bike the last few paces and look down the hill and out at the landscape with satisfaction.—Lee Hazelton.**

I am grateful to God for what I am doing. It is rewarding to go to work excited and to come home tired but deeply satisfied. I feel as if I am fulfilling Jesus' wishes when he said, "What you have done for the least of these (my children) you have done for me" (paraphrased from Matt. 25:40).

**Mary Regehr lives and works in Winnipeg with her husband, John. Aside from her counselling practice, she has been active in speaking to many groups about various aspects of her work.**

by Lorraine E. Matties

## Not in the Whirlwind

frayed woman sits  
in the long hard pew, trying to listen  
where the mind's din  
echoes like an ocean  
pressed hard against her ear  
by her children hearing in wonder  
what her senses have forgotten

even the holy hush  
of carved wood and prised light  
is drowned in the press of  
ancient rhythms, and

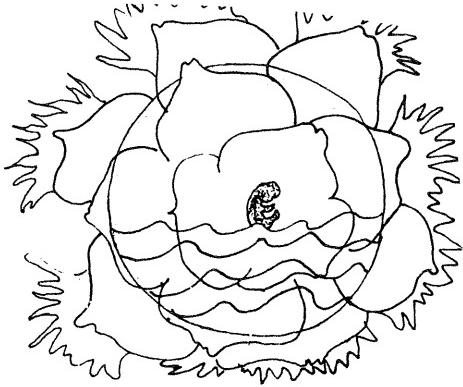
failing hearing  
she seeks a face  
turned in the vista  
of nodding heads  
inclined toward the sound  
she longs to hear

she settles for  
a dim lip-reading

holding the tiny hands  
squirming in the morning's light



the rose for tender strength  
the circle for eternity  
the water for life  
the fire for purity  
the child to teach love  
baby



by Betty Phillips

## For the Love of Children

For as long as I can remember, I have enjoyed children. Being the youngest of four, I was thrilled when I became an aunt and could babysit and play with my nieces and nephews. This love for children began to shape my thinking as I thought of a career.

My father and mother had a very limited formal education. Due to various circumstances, neither of them had completed junior high school. They determined to provide for us the educational opportunity they lacked. Thus I was encouraged to pursue a career immediately after high school. Despite their strong religious convictions, a university education took precedence over Bible college.

After two years at university and the influence of three brothers who had gone into teaching, I chose elementary teaching as my career. I was enthused about entering the work force, and at age 20, I had my first teaching appointment in Vancouver. I was not disappointed. I enjoyed teaching immensely.

Four years later, I was married and was able to help my husband, Murray, complete his degree by providing an income. Both of us wanted children and as soon as Murray had a full-time job, I resigned from teaching and we decided to try to have a family.

God gave us a beautiful daughter. I still remember the wonderful moment of holding her for the first time and my subsequent question to Murray: "How can anyone not believe in God after experiencing the miracle of childbirth?"

I enjoyed the challenges of mothering and was very content in this role. Twenty months later, our second child, a son, was born. Life was full of mothering and church-related activities. Once in a while I felt an urge to teach and be back in the classroom but on the whole my life was full of meaning. At other moments, as I listened to Murray preach while I was in the nursery, I thought I was a spectator to the exciting moments of our ministry. I started praying that if I was to minister to or give anything to anyone in the church congregation, God would bring them to the nursery. I watched as God honoured that prayer and brought people to me that I could help or who could help me.

Murray's career changed from preacher to teacher. He taught in a Bible school, and the opportunity for me to teach one course in a nearby high school presented itself. This turned out to be a real challenge. I was working with older students and needed to adjust to this. I clearly preferred being a mother to my preschool children and spending time with them. I completed that year and was pleased to discover I was pregnant with our third child. I am glad I had the opportunity to be present in my home to celebrate their growth for four years. Then the possibility of opening a bookstore emerged. It would be a bookstore that combined the beautiful and best in secular and religious books. Our hope was to nudge people toward God by the atmosphere created within the store. Together Murray and I worked toward this—fulfilling a dream for both of us.

Our oldest two children were in school and our youngest was four. We felt we could manage the bookstore and parent at the same time. Very deliberately I arranged my hours so that I could be home when my children left in the morning and when they came back after school. My youngest was often with me in the store or with grandparents who gave him so much special care and attention that only they could give. When I asked my children about my "full-time" job, their response was: "It's OK Mommy, as long as you don't bring the bookstore home with you." Together we had a satisfying four years where we saw the bookstore take root and grow into something productive and beautiful.

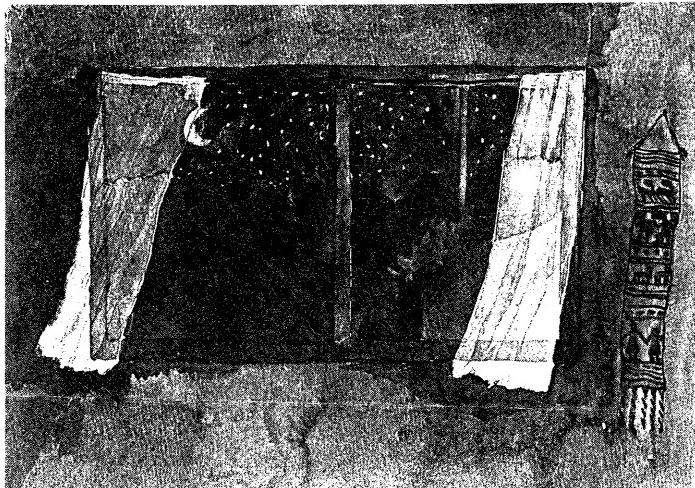
Even though the store was doing very well, the urge to sell our business came to Murray and me one evening in an uncanny way. We pursued this feeling and sold our store in the spring of 1982. The fall of that year was an oasis. Murray had a study leave. Our children were in school. My days were unscheduled. As we look back,

**The older I get the more I realize how much I need my friends. They help me grow. They engage me, nurture me, challenge me and HEAL me.—Lee Hazelton.**



we see the emotional strengthening and building that was going on that year. We would need that strength.

August of 1983 brought the discovery of cancer into my life. Within a week of the initial visit to the doctor, I had a modified radical mastectomy. What now, Lord? Would I see another Christmas, another birthday, my children's futures unfold? So many questions with no answers. Rarely a day went by without tears and a keen sense of loss.



Over the unsettled waves came God's voice—whispering, calming the water—"Be still and know that I am God!" As I took one day at a time, one event at a time, a new plan was unfolding. Helping in my children's school, I happened to mention to the principal how much I was enjoying the contact with the children. He encouraged me to apply for a job.

I was hired at that school for three months in the spring of 1984. It was my little miracle when teaching positions were hard to come by. God helped me take the focus off myself and showed me that I could still give of myself. Cancer hadn't changed that! Being in the classroom again was the best medicine I could have been given.

Now, as I look back six years later, I see God's hand in bringing me back into the workforce. I teach in the public school system three days a week, job-sharing with another "mom." I have the best of both worlds and sometimes find it hard to believe that I am being paid to do something I love so much. I feel God has given me an

extended family. My mothering skills are not confined to my three children but every day I exercise them in my grade two/three classroom. With a hug and a smile, a little girl said to me, "You are my mommy." What child does not respond to love?

My heart is full of gratitude! I am grateful for having been able to be with my children during their preschool years. I am grateful to God for health, strength, and educational opportunities. I am grateful to Murray and my three children who have encouraged my growth and development in a career that I love. My cancer has not recurred, and I am enjoying my immediate and extended family very much. One of the growing experiences of the last few years has been the expanding opportunities and need for counseling. I have been serving on the board of Columbia Christian Counseling and have decided to pursue graduate studies in counseling psychology for elementary school children at university. I want to sharpen the skills and giftedness that grow out of my deep love for children.

**Betty Phillips lives in Mount Lehman, British Columbia, with her husband Murray and her three children. At present, four of the five family members are engaged in university programs. Betty began a graduate program in Counseling Psychology this past July.**

**The more we lean on ourselves, the weaker we become and the more we lean on God, the stronger and more whole we become.—Lee Hazelton.**

by Wanda Derksen

## Motherhood and Spirituality

I am tempted to begin this writing with a scripture passage, and to reflect on how motherhood has enriched my devotional life and prayer time. This is not, however, true. I do not sit at the kitchen table with Bible in hand. Instead, I stand in front of the washing machine, run to the demands of a two-year-old, and cook food that is only half-eaten.

My life has become so practical! When I find myself within the vicinity of a theological discussion, or any discussion that requires some thought beyond the present, I find it hard to concentrate. Rather than thinking about intentional Christian community and the meaning of church, my mind wanders off to how I can properly parent a toddler or how will I survive with a "terrible two" and an expected newborn. With guilt I find myself fantasizing about having a newly renovated kitchen, or better yet, a maid that would come in and clean the house once a week.

Since my name has been changed to "Mommy," my brain seems to have been reformed. My desire to explore ideas and to gain greater philosophical and spiritual understanding has been overshadowed by more practical exploration. A constant striving for a closer relationship with God has been replaced with making my own cloth diapers and trying not to brag about it, and jumping to the screams of a child who refuses to go down for a nap. What has happened to my spirituality?

Strange as it seems, motherhood has strengthened my Christian faith. Through motherhood my understanding of God and my faith has been significantly deepened. Through the experience of being a mother my belief in God has been reconfirmed and my understanding of unconditional love has been realized.



When our son was born I was awed by the miracle of birth. I knew this person coming out of my body was not of my construction. I was amazed at how my body functioned to provide care for this child. When my child cried, my milk poured. When my child sucked, my uterus shrank. God's existence was confirmed.

God does touch our lives in personal ways. My first experience with motherhood was a reminder of this. Not that I had previously lived in total question of God's existence. But there has always been a skeptical side to my faith. I am not one to follow blindly or even talk as if I do. However, through labor and childbirth God gave me assurance of God's reality.

The experience of motherhood has especially given me a clearer understanding of agape love, or the unconditional love which is written and preached to us. When our son was born, an inner change happened to me. For the first time, I felt filled with an all-sacrificing love for another person. For the first time I experienced the type of love in which I could freely sacrifice my life for my child's. It is the love you see in the works of Mother Theresa and Martin Luther King, Jr. It is the love you read of in the Bible. It is God's love that was given to me when I became a mother. I wish I had more of this love for other people.



With this experience of love came a fuller understanding of God and the sacrifice God made in allowing Jesus to be killed for our benefit. Motherhood brought home to me how much God loves.

With motherhood comes change. With the birth of our son came a confirmation that God is alive and affects our personal lives in miraculous ways, that I too have the ability to love another person as God loves us. My devotional life may have disappeared, but the Christian story is more of a reality to me than ever before.

**Wanda Derksen is an employment counselor in Winnipeg, Manitoba, where she lives with her husband, Waldy, and their son Zachary. Their second son, Daniel, died this past July in the eighth month of pregnancy. A memorial service was held in their Mennonite Brethren church to acknowledge Daniel's life and to help the community in its grief.**

by Dora Dueck

## The Unexpected Transp

If I had written this several months ago, perhaps on a quiet winter morning with the sun streaming over the table where I work, and me full of fond thoughts of our three absent children safe and busy at school, I might have been able to "wax eloquent" on the subject of motherhood and spirituality. Both words lend themselves to ethereal and solitary pontification.

But it is now the summer holidays. At this moment the boys, ages 13 and 11, are doing the dishes, laughing, talking, arguing; their seven-year-old sister wants to be part of things too but her humor and comments are not appreciated.

The house is messier and noisier now, and I'm busier in a different way, trying to juggle the supervision of their jobs, house guests, day trips.

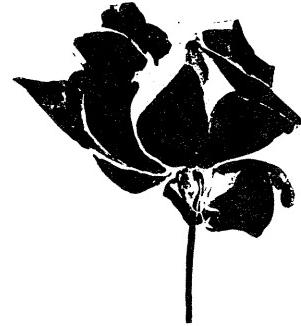
A little girl needs comfort because she feels her pet cat has been maligned. Then an adolescent with endless energy for recreation needs to be motivated for other pursuits. Then a keen reader requests transportation to the library immediately because there is NOTHING TO READ IN THE HOUSE.

And over and over there are sibling arguments of every imaginable variety and topic. (I read somewhere that children who feel secure with their parents tend to exhibit more rivalry with each other. It is small consolation.)

What I write about spirituality and motherhood today is shaped by the actual presence of children. I am in a practical and somewhat scattered mode!

Perhaps this is the way spirituality and motherhood intersect, however. Occasionally I have experiences either

**I feel healed and renewed  
in the cradle of my  
family.—Lee Hazelton.**



with God or as a mother that seem mystical, touching heaven, but most of the time it's pretty earthy, made of common things like getting through our daily schedules and the difficult demands of being patient, loving, and wise.

Having children has forced me, again and again, to move outward, beyond my own ego. Our three children have been catalysts not so much of my fulfillment (which is the expectation often projected by sentimental reflection on mothering) than of my maturation. Their need to grow up pushes me to grow up.

We are always told how important we parents are in our children's lives and how much we influence them. But recently I've become aware of how significant they are for us, simply as people interacting with us, and also as agents of influence upon us.

I think I was fortunate because I wanted children, was able to have three, and have a fair supply of natural inclination for the role. I wanted to stay home with them and usually enjoyed doing so.

I always did something else too; I read, finished my university degree one course at a time, wrote a book. That kept me busier than I wanted to be, but much happier than if I had tried to live only inside their world.

Mothering seems easier now that the children are school age. The physical demands are less and I have more time and freedom to write and nurture my inner life. It is a wonderful new stage of motherhood.

I'm surprised at this stage how much I receive from my children. I had not expected in mid-life to be so in need of love and assurance, and then to find it in such large measure from this source.

They make me laugh. They are developing keen wit, and they pick up crazy jokes everywhere. When we find ourselves spontaneously laughing together at mealtime, I feel a flash of tremendous closeness between us all.

There's something else they have given me. I grew up in a home where we were taught the Bible's "honor your parents." We have followed suit to instill the same expectation of respect in our offspring (understanding that we too, as parents, are under authority). And it does work to make family life function well.

But then, putting in my years as a mother, now in the

position to be "honored," I am startled by a new sense of tenderness and warmth and respect within me for my parents. In my early adult years I evaluated my upbringing and found it wanting. Childhood traumas hurt again, more than before. I would do better as a parent! But being a mother myself has helped me work through my own past in a fresh way. My children are a means of God's grace for my ongoing but deepening honor toward my parents.



Having children has taught me much about prayer. I try to work at problems through prayer. I begin with the premise that answers to parenting problems are not found in a book but within the reality of who the child is and who I am (Bruno Bettelheim's Good Enough Parents taught me this), and further, that God is willing to give me the wisdom I need.

Using pen and paper, I pray about the child in question starting as Philippians 4 suggests, with unhurried reflection about and gratitude for that child, writing down images and insights about him/her as they come to mind. Then I ask God specifically about the troubling situation, again asking for and noting insights. These may include memories of parallel situations in my life, reflection on what is coloring my response to the child, a specific action I can take, release of the problem into God's keeping.

• **Women in Ministry**

• **Susan Redding Emel of Topeka, Kan., served as transition pastor for Manhattan (Kan.) Fellowship during July and August.**



• **Margaret Ediger, La Comunidad de Esperanza, Dallas, Tx, was ordained in the summer. She and her husband serve as church planters in East Dallas.**

• **Pearl Hartz is the interim pastor at a new Mennonite fellowship in San Diego, Calif.**

• **Hugo and Doreen Hildebrand became mission ministers for Mennonite Conference of Eastern Canada this summer.**

• **Elsie Neufeld, Nutana Park Church, Saskatoon, began in July as the new president of Canadian**

**Women in Mission, succeeding Phyllis Wiebe, Winnipeg.**

• **Kathryn Goering Reid began in Sept. as pastor at Austin (Texas) Fellowship.**

• **Ken and Leona Gingerich became pastors of Albuquerque (N.M.) Mennonite Church recently.**

I have no doubt that God hears prayers for our children, but perhaps the most important part of such prayer is the flow of conversation I have with God and the opportunity in listening to be nurtured in my own spirit.

Sometimes we're tempted to use prayer to manipulate our children through God. Fortunately, it doesn't work! Pushed by our children into helplessness sometimes, we may begin to pray the true prayer of our hearts, that of our own need of God.

My biggest enemy is fear. Fear of what we might yet have to face. Of our mistakes, potentially bad choices. I would like guarantees of comfort and safety. Instead I hear, "Don't be afraid. I, the Lord, am here."

Recently I was thinking about how children learn justice and compassion. I asked one of the boys what he felt had made him the fair, caring person he is. I knew we had worked to teach our children justice through example and through stern precept ("You may not laugh at, put down, tease those who may be fat, handicapped, of another race, etc. etc."). We read many books to them, among them stories of slave boys and blind girls and heroes of other races, etc., and I'm sure this accumatively has given them shoes to walk inside the experiences of those unlike themselves. What would this son's perception of these as teaching influences be, I wondered?

He paused a second, then answered, "I know what it feels like to be laughed at."

This stung me. It wasn't because he didn't mention one of the many good things we had done, but because I knew immediately, painfully, that he spoke an important truth about how we learn.

He's a bright kid, popular, but it's true, he's had a speech impediment (though greatly improved after four years of therapy) and he's been laughed at and mimicked, hurt by the thoughtlessness of his peers. I remember his heart-wrenching question when he was about four: "Why did Jesus make me so I can't say my sounds right?"

I didn't know. To teach him compassion? I wouldn't have dared say it, even if I had known. Would he have wanted compassion at that cost?

This incident illustrates my experience of spirituality and motherhood. I chose discipleship first—the "long obedience in the same direction" (Eugene Paterson).



Then, motherhood, and as it should be, from the life of my spirit, giving to my children. The expected giving.

But the unexpected transport of their lives into mine! Motherhood is this constant, this unescapable intervention: of their demands, of their love. Of their wisdom! I'm afraid, and then an 11-year-old, who has learned to be compassionate through something painful, reminds me that what eventually comes out of what happens cannot be predicted but is usually blessedly more than we had hoped for.

**Dora Dueck lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba, with her husband, Helmut, and their three children. She is the author of a novel about Paraguay, *Under the Still Standing Sun*, several published articles, and some poetry.**

The way I'm expressing it to my family and friends is that I am packing my bags so I'll be ready when the train comes. If the train should not come, all the better. And I'm tidying up my house, so to speak. You know when you go away you like to know everything is in order; the bills are paid and the rooms vacuumed? It's like that.

So I'm packing my bags. They say "you can't take it with you", but my bags are stuffed with riches. What are they? Oh, love, patience, compassion, 20 years of sharing and loving a beloved husband and sons; the deep caring and respect for others and myself that I've learned; loyalty, devotion and trust. They were hard lessons, so I'd like to pack those fruits. And jammed into the top of

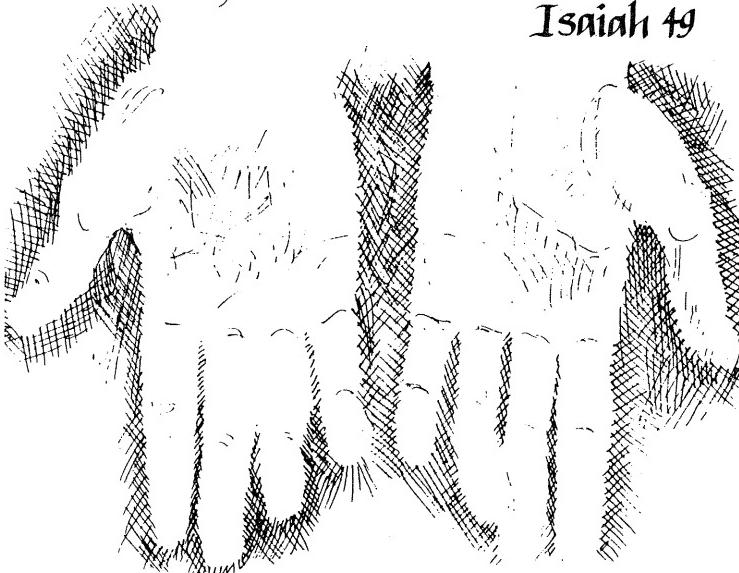
my bag and all the corners, see laughter. Maybe God will grant my prayer and let me die laughing at age 90... Lastly, all the love that has been poured into me this last year, I'm certainly not going to leave that behind.

—Lee Hazelton.



*I will not forget  
you ~ Behold,  
I have graven you  
on the palms of  
my hands.*

*Isaiah 49*



## Letters

- Thank you for sending me the issue of Report that I requested. Enclosed is a \$10 donation.

I really enjoyed the issue a friend shared with me and I thank you for your efforts to provide such a helpful publication. I also appreciate your use of recycled paper for the printing!

Best wishes for the continued success of this service. I'll look forward to subsequent issues.

—Carol Alleman Lopez, Ephrata, Pa.

- When a friend recently shared the latest issue of *Report* with me, I realized that it's been a long time since I've received the newsletter. Please re-activate my subscription immediately. Could you please send me back issues beginning July-Aug. '89 through the present. Many thanks.

—Sandy Bertsche King, Sturgis, Mich.

- Your recent issue on co-dependency (No. 91) is both timely and balanced. I recently was introduced to the concept of co-dependency through reading the book, *Co-dependent No More* by Beattie. While I experienced the exhilaration of new freedom as I considered the concept, I also became troubled by an inability to integrate these ideas with my social responsibility born out of faith values.

This issue has triggered the beginning of the integration for me. I am grateful that you've taken the newest "buzzword" and have couched it in a manner which brings balance and wholeness.

—Ann Yoder, Harrisonburg, Va.

- Enclosed is a \$10 subscription. Please send as many back issues as you can. I really enjoyed your May-June, '90 issue on Women of South Africa (No. 90). It was inspiring and well-done. Keep up the good work!  
—Elizabeth Rice, Raleigh, N.C.
- I have not always been pleased with what Report has offered. In fact, I have sometimes been indignant.



Those were times when writers sounded like only women have been oppressed, when biblical teachings on marriage have been discredited as patriarchal in a negative sense, when women as a whole have been held up as naturally more sensitive to God's leading or capable of discipleship than men. In other words, when it has been sexist with a prejudice against men.

In spite of my reservations about the way Report sometimes deals with issues, I see that it does address important matters and I wish to continue receiving it.

Please send some sample copies to the address of my friend.

—Anette Eisenbeis, Marion, S.D.

- I am an ordained United Methodist minister. I appreciate Report very much and would like to subscribe to it.

If it is convenient to you, I would like to meet you to talk about women ministers in the Mennonite tradition.

—Betsy Iseminger, Lancaster, Pa.

- I have enjoyed every issue of Report for several years. Your publication is honest, straight-forward and real. I've used several issues with my adult Sunday school class very effectively. Thanks for your good work.

Women in Mission suggested starting a women's group with an alternative focus—which we now want to do. I'd like to have some back issues of Report to distribute to the women who might be interested in starting such a group.

The enclosed check is to cover my own subscription and some back copies. Thank you.

—Marion Stroud, Wadsworth, Ohio

- I want to express my appreciation for the Report issue on co-dependency (No. 91). The entire issue is very helpful to me. I wish to share the issue with several other women. Will you please send me two additional copies.

I wish also to tell you that I am grateful for the support expressed for all women, especially on the last page of the May-June (No. 90) issue.

- **Ten Facts About Violence Against Women Compiled by the majority staff of the Senate Judiciary Committee (Aug. 29, 1990).**

- **Of the American women alive today, 25 million either have been, or will be, raped at least once during their lives.**

- **Last year, the number of women abused by their husbands was greater than**

**the number of women who got married.**

- **In 1950, police caught 83 percent of all rapists; in 1988, police caught only 53 percent of them.**

- **Nearly 50 percent of abusive husbands batter their wives when they are pregnant, making them four times more likely to bear infants of low birth weight.**

Enclosed please find my check in support of women's concerns.

—Ruth Benoliel, Bellevue, Wa.

- Your co-dependency issue caught the eye of my daughter so I ordered her a subscription. I'm sorry so many of our disillusioned Bible college graduates don't get a paper such as this. They are deep thinkers, though not church-goers, but nevertheless will help the shape of our future religions. Thanks for all the good issues.

—Winona Remple, Winnipeg, Manitoba

- Could you please send me the Report issue on co-dependency (No. 91)? A friend has shared her copy with me and I have found the articles stimulating and desire to have a personal copy.

I would also like a trial subscription to your publication if this is possible.

—Doris Layton, Phoenix, Ariz.

- I have recently decided to attend seminary partly due to having my consciousness raised by your publication and that of the Washington Memo. Please continue to send it to me at my new address. I would like to share it with other students.

—Sharon Carson, Delaware, Ohio

*Washington Memo is written by MCC U.S. Peace Section Washington Office staff and interprets national legislation and policy, seeking to reflect biblical concerns for justice and peace. To subscribe, contact MCC, PO Box 500, Akron, PA, 17501-0500.*

- I am very sorry that these subscription renewal cards will be reaching you so much later than the suggested date. We do wish to continue receiving Report.

I am involved in a study group, Doing Theology/Reading the Bible From Women's Perspective. We find Report very helpful, enriching and theologically stimulating. Thank you so much for all the effort and sensitivity that goes into the preparation and publication of these excellent reports.

—Eunice L. Miller, Buenos Aires, Argentina

- Report is a significant resource for many persons who struggle with the realities of our society and I am grateful for your important work. I have used various issues in my private practice, as well as in discussions

- Of all those arrested for major crimes—murder, rape, robbery, assault, burglary, larceny theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson—rapists are the most likely to escape conviction.
- If every woman victimized by domestic violence last year were to join hands in a line, the string of people would span from New York to Los Angeles and back again.
- More than half of all homeless women are on the street because they are fleeing domestic violence.
- More than 40 percent of college women who have been raped say that they expect to be raped again.
- There were more women “wounded” by rapists last

with friends. Many have come to realize that being “Mennonite” does not exempt us from the trauma of injustice.

—Donna J. Neufeld, (LCSW), North Newton, Kan.

year than marines wounded in all of World War II.

- There are nearly three times as many animal shelters in the U.S. as there are battered women's shelters.



sponsored by the Franconia Women's Council on Leadership. Local housing and child care are available. For more information, contact Rosie Epp, 306 Emmons Drive, 5-B, Princeton, NJ 08540

- Lisa Schirch-Elias, a 1990 graduate in Peace and Conflict Studies at Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo, Ont., has received the 1990 June Schwartzenruber Fund award. She will use the award to develop projects to help the Mennonite community understand the Innu, one of Canada's native peoples.
- The Reverend Doctor Rebecca Parker, feminist theologian, minister, and teacher, is the newly elected president of the Starr King School for the Ministry. She will become the **first female president of a seminary in the U.S.**
- Goshen College seeks faculty for a full-time, long-term position in the Division of Teacher Education, with emphasis on curriculum and educational foundations. Position open August 1991. Qualifications include Ph.D. or Ed. D. with advanced graduate study in elementary education, curriculum, educational foundations or other areas. Candidates with dissertation in progress may be considered. Send resume and three professional references to John W. Eby, Academic Dean, Goshen College, Goshen, IN 46526. Applications will be received until January 15, 1991.
- For information on how a **mother of three started her own business to help supplement the farm income** send \$9.95 plus \$2.00 postage and handling for a 25 page report to Creative Entrepeneur, 107 Baubice, Pioneer, OH 43554.
- Dr. Mercy A. Oduyoye, seeking to represent her sisters in Africa, brought her concerns to Eastern Mennonite College for a series of lectures in October. Dr. Oduyoye, speaking in college assembly, said she had planned a career in teaching, but was encouraged to study theology and became one of the first women in her country of Ghana to complete graduate theological studies in 1963. She told her audience that “studying theology requires being open to the human spirit and the Spirit of God,” adding that “I want to be an instrument of change for my people.” Oduyoye is a member of the Methodist Church of Nigeria, a prolific writer and the deputy general secretary of the World Council of Churches. Her EMC visit was sponsored by the Mennonite Board of Missions, Elkhart, Ind.



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### • The Ecumenical Decade for Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988-1998)

For every woman tired of acting weak when she knows she is strong, there is a man weary of appearing strong when he feels vulnerable.

For every woman sick of acting dumb, there is a man burdened with the constant expectation of "knowing everything."

For every woman called unfeminine when she competes, there is a man for whom competition is the only proof of masculinity.

For every woman feeling tied down by children, there is a man denied the full joy of sharing parenthood.

WOMEN'S CONCERN REPORT is published bimonthly by the MCC Committee on Women's Concerns. The committee, formed in 1973, believes that Jesus Christ teaches equality of all persons. By sharing information and ideas, the committee strives to promote new relationships and corresponding supporting structures in which men and women can grow toward wholeness and mutuality. Articles and views presented in REPORT do not necessarily reflect official positions of the Committee on Women's Concerns.

WOMEN'S CONCERN REPORT edited by Christine Wenger Nofsinger. Layout by Shirley Stauffer Redekop. Correspondence and address changes should be sent to Chris Nofsinger, Editor, MCC, PO Box 500, Akron, PA 17501-0500.

U.S. residents may send subscriptions to the above address. Canadian residents may send subscriptions to MCC Canada, 50 Kent Avenue, Kitchener, ON N2G 3R1. A donation of \$10.00 per year per subscription is suggested.

*This newsletter is printed on recycled paper.*



**Mennonite  
Central  
Committee**

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21 South 12th Street  
PO Box 500  
Akron, PA  
17501-0500

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For every woman denied meaningful employment or equal pay, there is a man bearing full financial responsibility for another human being.

For every woman who takes a step towards her own liberation, there is a man who finds the way to freedom made a little easier.

The focus of the Ecumenical Decade is upon human issues. It is built upon the belief that justice, peace, and integrity—in human relations and in the whole created order—is part of the Church's calling in Christ. It holds as basic the belief that as long as one person or group or class is denied freedom and justice, all suffer.

*The Committee on Women's Concerns endorses the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women, a project of the World Council of Churches.*

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